

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

INDEX CARDS

Tribe-Creek

Civil-war- Refugee

Boggy Depot

Schools- Ashbury Mission

School-Northfield, Mass.

Chief- Motey Tiger

Teaching-Boarding School for Creek Girls.

Government School at Loneca Agency.

Ctoe Agency

Ella M. Robinson,
Interviewer,
September 1, 1937.

Life and Experiences of a Pioneer Creek Indian Woman
Mrs. Kate Shaw Ahrens
Wagoner, Oklahoma.

I was born at Boggy Depot, in 1864. My mother, Kizzie Lewis, was a full-blood Creek Indian and my father, William Shaw, a white man. He was a native of Maryland and came to Indian Territory before the Civil War. I was their only child.

As many of the Indians did, my parents immigrated to Texas to escape the ravages of war. At the close of the war they returned to the Choctaw Nation and lived for a time at Boggy Depot, where I was born. During that time, exact date not known, my father made a trip to Fort Smith to attend to some property he owned. He was taken suddenly ill and died and was buried there. As travel was difficult and conditions so unsettled in the Territory at that time, my mother was unable to go and we never knew the exact location of his grave.

Being left alone, my mother returned to the Creek Nation to live among her own tribe and relatives. We

- 2 -

settled at Old Town, near the present site of Eufaula. As we lived near Asbury Mission, a Methodist school, I attended school there and also Sunday school. I lived in that vicinity until I was sixteen years old, when I went north to school.

In 1879, Reverend Dwight L. Moody of Northfield, Massachusetts, who had gained world wide fame, saw the need of a school where young people of small means could secure a sound education; such as he had been deprived of in his youth. His contact with people in every walk of life, not only emphasized the need of such an institution but gave him the opportunity to lay the idea before those who could help him formulate his plan and carry out his hopes.

In the fall of 1879, about a year after the first purchase of property in Northfield was made, a class of twenty-five girls arrived to live in Mr. Moody's own home until the first dormitory could be completed. The dormitory that housed the students was a large brick building, the dining room and kitchen being some distance away. Nearly 100 students were enrolled the following year, 1880. Today, with 11,250 alumnae, 543 students,

- 3 -

79 buildings on a 12,000 acre campus, Northfield Seminary continues to offer a sound Christian education at about half the usual cost, to girls, who, lacking this opportunity, would be seriously handicapped.

There were three underlying principles governing the school; first, that the bible should be taught, a part of the regular curriculum, during every year the student was in attendance; second, that each girl should participate in the manual work; third, that the cost should be so low that practically any girl could afford to attend and that scholarships for girls, unable to pay, should be available. These principles have remained unchanged and the graduates from this school girdled the globe.

Encouraged and inspired by the phenomenal growth and marvelous success for girls, Mr. Moody opened a similar school for boys in 1881. This school, which was located across the Connecticut river and known as Mount Hermon, has enjoyed the same measure of success as Northfield Seminary.

In 1880, Mr. Moody sent his principal teacher, Miss Tucker, to the Indian Territory to secure students

- 4 -

for the school, offering the same advantages to Indian girls as was offered to others. Miss Tucker came to Kufaula, Creek nation, and conducted examinations for entrance credit. They were given in reading, writing, mathematics, and history. As I was fortunate enough to make the grade, I was among the sixteen Indian girls selected to go from the Indian Territory. Only a partial list who went at that time is available. They were: Jennie Ironsides, Cherokee; Kate Timberlake, Cherokee, (now Mrs. James E. Wolf of Los Angeles, California). Jennie and Rose Yargee, Creek; Mary Colbert, Creek; Lydia Keys, Cherokee, (now Mrs. Charles Taylor, Fremont, Nebraska). Hattie Ward, Choctaw; Lonie Stidham, Creek; Ida Stephens, Cherokee; Annie Rogers, Cherokee; Ida Beatty, Cherokee; Mamie Ross, Cherokee; and myself, Kate Shaw, Creek. Fannie Keys, sister of Lydia Keys, came a year later.

As we had to have a starting point, the girls from the southern part of the Territory met at Muskogee. A special coach was furnished for our accommodation by Jay Gould, Head of the MK&T Railroad System at that time. The girls from the northern part of the Territory boarded

- 5 -

the train at Vinita. As no meals were furnished on the train, each girl was supplied with a lunch basket, generously filled at home with home-cooking. That was the last home-cooking I enjoyed for four years.

We left Muskogee on Monday evening at nine o'clock and arrived at Northfield Thursday noon. As travel was not as rapid in those days as it is now, that was considered good time. Our coach was attached to an outgoing train whenever it was necessary to change routes.

As I had never been among northern people before, many things were very queer to me. Especially, the way they talked; and I am sure we were just as queer to them. The cooking was another thing that was quite different. I had never seen sugar put in cornbread before and we Indian Girls didn't like it. Rice was served with sugar and cream as a dessert, where we had always eaten it as a vegetable. The school maintained a fine dairy herd and there was an abundance of milk, cream and butter. We also had plenty of fresh vegetables during the season.

I well remember the fine chestnut hunts we had on Saturdays. Mr. Moody would announce that morning that we were going and to get the lunch baskets filled. He

- 6 -

and Mrs. Moody often went along and always the teachers.

Mr. Moody was absent a great deal of the time during 1880 and 1881, for it was during those years that he conducted his evangelistic campaign in England that gave him world-wide fame. He returned in the fall of 1881 and that was when he opened the school for boys at Mount Hermon.

We were taught all of the home arts and spent one hour a day in the performance of our duties. We assisted in the housekeeping, cooking, serving meals, and laundry work, for which we were given credit in our school course.

As we were so far from home and railway travel quite expensive, I did not come home during vacations. One summer I visited one of the girls in Montreal, Canada, and another summer I went to Ontario, Canada. Those were very enjoyable times.

Many distinguished ministers visited our school from time to time. A large convocation was held there and ministers from all over the world were in attendance. We waited on the tables and I was amazed when they seated the negro delegates with the white delegates. Those in

- 7 -

charge of the dining room service could not understand any reason why the, should be discriminated against in a matter of that kind.

Once the Jubilee Singers were there and we enjoyed them immensely.

As we had students enrolled from all parts of the United States and Canada, they were an interesting group and we learned a great deal from each other. One day a girl asked me to go with her to the meat market and I asked, "Where is that, I never heard of such a place." And she said, "Where do you get your meat at home?" and I answered, "In the smokehouse, of course." I told her that we killed and cured our own hog meat in the winter and when we wanted fresh beef, we had one butchered and divided it among the neighbors. The neighbors, in turn, did likewise. We always had baked beans, brown bread and coffee for Sunday morning breakfast. The beans were baked in our own oven but there was a public oven in the town where people took their beans, prepared and in the pot, on Saturday evening and went for them on Sunday morning.

While I was in school (1882), my mother married to Motey Tiger, a prominent Creek Indian, who afterward became

- 8 -

Chief of the Creeks.

At the end of the four years, I returned to my home in the Indian Territory. I went by boat to New York City where I visited some of the girls who had attended school there. Lydia Keys, Kate Timberlake, and myself stayed the entire four years. On getting home, I at once set about to secure a school for I felt that I must get to work. I attended the Teachers Institute held each year at Okmulgee and was assigned a school west of Eufaula, which I taught for one year. I then entered college at Lexington, Missouri, where I graduated. On returning home, I secured a position in the Boarding School for Creek Girls, at Muskogee, which at that time was under the supervision of Miss Alice Robertson, afterward a Congresswoman from Oklahoma. Miss Carlotta Archer and Miss Addie Willey, both Cherokees, taught there at the same time. Miss Alice's mother, Miss A. E. W. Robertson, was with her then and they lived in the building known as Minerva Home. At the close of the first year, a call had come to Colonel D. M. Wisdom, Indian Agent at Muskogee, for a teacher

- 9 -

in the Government School at Ponca Agency and he offered me the position, which I accepted. The Agency was located among what was termed the wild tribes, to which the Poncas belonged. The Otoe Agency was near, as the Otoe Reservation joined that of the Poncas. They, too, belonged to the wild tribe. We had large brick building, comfortable and substantial. There were one hundred students enrolled. In the summer, the Indians lived in little houses built for them by the Government, but went down on Salt Fork River and camped during the winter.

The food for the school was secured at the Government Commissary and cooked in large vats. That was not very appetizing to the teachers. No attempt was made to teach the students table manners and the food was served with no regard to style. It seemed to us teachers a very poor way, if their intentions were to civilize the Indians. The teachers combined and employed a cook and we had our meals served separately, each paying their pro rata of the expenses.

We were employed the twelve months of the year at a salary of \$50.00 per month and we paid our own expenses. We were on duty all summer unless a leave of absence was granted.³

- 10 -

It was against the rules for the children to be taken home often, and then, only with the consent of the superintendent. One day the mother of Dell Yellowbird, a little boy, came for him and on being refused permission to take him, drew a long knife from the folds of her blanket and threw it at the superintendent, barely missing him.

We visited often at the Otoe Agency as there were a number of white government employes there.

I taught at Ponka Agency from 1888 to 1891, when I resigned to be married to Mr. A. J. W. Ahrens, of St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. Ahrens was employed at that time by the Simmons-Gregory Wholesale Dry Goods House of St. Louis. We went immediately to that city and lived there for three years. We then came back to the Territory and located at Eufaula, where my husband engaged in the mercantile business, operating his own store until a big fire occurred and burned the building as well as the stock. In 1899, thirty-eight years ago, we moved to our present home, a farm adjoining the town of Wagoner.

We have two children, a daughter, Mrs. George

ABRENS, KATE SHAW (MRS.). INTERVIEW.

7374

- 11 -

Harrison of Sand Springs and a son, Henry, of Tulsa; and two grandchildren, the children of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison.

I have seen many changes in this country since my childhood, but with the majority of the Indians, I think, it lacks a great deal of being an improvement.

Footnote: Personal letter from Reverend Dwight L. Moody, Northfield, Massachusetts, 1880.

Miss Shaw:

Your letter received and contents noted. The school will open about the middle of September. There will be a car to bring the girls from the Indian Territory here, without charge and free of expense. We shall expect to receive you as one of our scholars.

Yours truly,

D. L. Moody.